Kharga Oasis and Thebes: The Missing Piece of the Puzzle in the Relocation of Amen Worship in the 27th Dynasty?

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I will introduce the temples in the Kharga Oasis that are known to have worshipped the Theban god Amen. This indicates that the principal god Amen or Amen-Ra temporarily moved from Thebes, the traditional religious centre in the Nile Valley, to the Kharga Oasis where he had a strong influence. The evidence shows that the Persian kings in the 27th Dynasty, especially Darius I, discontinued construction activity in Thebes and instead built some huge structures in the Kharga Oasis. This, combined with the fact that the institution of “the God's Wife of Amen” disappeared from Thebes at the same time, possibly indicates a large-scale migration of people from Thebes to the Kharga Oasis. Such a migration created a unique Amen adoration in Kharga and Darius I willingly allowed the worship of Amen because Amen was a sun god with a ram's head - much like the Persian Royal family's own motif.

**Keywords:** Kharga Oasis, Thebes, Darius I, Amen, Persia, Hibis

**Introduction**

The Nile Valley received various materials and information from the surrounding areas throughout Egyptian history. This is obvious from burial goods that have found in Abydos or Saqqara in the Predynastic Period such as lapis lazuli from Afghanistan,1 carnelian from the Persian Gulf region and silver and wine in pottery from Palestine. Incense such as olibanum and myrrh for cult activities, ceremonies and funeral rites came to the Nile Valley via Nubia. Oases in Egypt’s western desert also played an important role in Egyptian cultural development. Especially the Kharga Oasis which was the nearest one to the Nile Valley and a starting point when journeying to the Dakhla Oasis in the west or Nubia in the south. The purpose of this article is to confirm the original function of the Kharga Oasis and to consider it's role and meaning in the introduction of the worship of Amen from the Nile Valley to Egypt’s western desert in the 27th

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Firstly, I will introduce the temples in the Kharga Oasis that are known to have worshipped Amen. Secondly, I will outline the characteristics of the caravan routes connecting the Kharga Oasis with the neighboring world. Finally, I will demonstrate that the Amen referred to in the Kharga Oasis was not the Amen-Ra of Thebes but was, in fact, the Amen of Hibis. This means that the principal god Amen or Amen-Ra temporarily moved from Thebes to the Kharga Oasis. Then I suggest a hypothesis that Darius I, a Persian king, transferred a religious centre from Thebes to Hibis in the Kharga Oasis.

I. Adoration of Amen in the Temples of the Kharga Oasis

Amen is first mentioned in the Pyramid Texts (utterance 301) of the 5th Dynasty. The oldest temple for Amen was built in Thebes at least as early as the 11th Dynasty. Then Amen obviously became the principal god in the reign of Amenemhat I in the 12th Dynasty, subsequently became Amen-Ra by a process of syncretism in the New Kingdom and was regarded as Zeus in the Ptolemaic Period. Finally Amen spread across the eastern Mediterranean area. The strong influence eventually reached to the Kharga Oasis.

It is generally thought that Hibis Temple, the largest one in Kharga Oasis, was built by Darius I and was devoted to Amen or Amen-Ra (accurately Amen of Hibis or Amen-Re, Lord of Hibis) (Fig.1). The Great Amen Hymns were engraved on the interior wall in the hypostyle hall. Nadura, two kilometers southeast from Hibis Temple, has two temples. The main temple is located on a hill-top and made of sandstone. The internal surfaces of the temple contain many figures for example Amen, Mut, Khons, Ra-Horakhty and so on with hieroglyphs. El-Ghueita Temple, twenty kilometers south from Hibis Temple, was dedicated to the Theban triad, mainly the ram-headed Amen. It is thought that its building began to build under the reign of Darius I because of his cartouches in the sanctuary. According to existing inscriptions in the temple, extensions were built by Ptolemy III, Ptolemy IV, and Ptolemy X. El-Zayyan Temple is located thirty kilometers south from Hibis Temple. It consisted of three sandstone gates, inner and outer mud-brick structures and a sanctuary. It was also dedicated to the Theban triad, with the main god being, once again, Amen of Hibis with a ram-head. According to Greek inscriptions on the lintel of the second gate, this temple was rebuilt in the year of Antonius Pius (140 AD). Because of this inscription, the temple was obviously constructed before then, perhaps during the Ptolemaic Period. However, there is a possibility that the construction date is as early as the reign of Darius I in the 27th Dynasty (the
same as Hibis and El-Ghueita Temples) because the temple was dedicated to Amen of Hibis in the same way as Hibis Temple.

It is obvious that there is a heavy influence of Amen or Amen-Re on all temples in Kharga. The temples of Nadura and El-Ghueita especially locate on a hill-top. They functioned as lookouts, ensuring the safety of caravans in the Roman period, but it seems that the choice of the location derived from the sun god's cult before then. On the other hand, the temples of Hibis and El-Zayyan were located on a depression. In terms of Egyptian dualism and the topographical situation, it is possible that Hibis and Nadura were functioning as a pair in a similar way to El-Zayyan and El-Ghueita. Alternatively, Hibis and El-Zayyan Temples possibly played a religious role in ceremonial events such as the Opet Festival. The main event in this festival was the ritual procession of the divine images from Karnak Temple to Luxor Temple. Another important festival was when the image of Amen of Luxor visited Medinet Habu ever ten days. As already noted, the fact that Nadura and El-Ghueita are located on a hill-top and have military aspects from the Roman Period shows that the function of the temples is different from Hibis and El-Zayyan Temples. In all events, the sun god Amen-Re was the most awesome and familiar god to the people who lived in the Western Desert which had more exposure to the heavy rays of the sun ray than the Nile Valley.

As mentioned above, we confirmed the temples dedicated to Amen on reliefs and inscriptions in the Kharga Oasis, and the influence of Amen dates back at least to the 27th dynasty. In the next chapter, I will analyze and confirm the various sources of information concerning the routes, people, and goods which connected the adoration of Amen with the Kharga Oasis.

II. The Caravan Routes and the Network Systems

Although the origins of the monastery in the Kharga Oasis date to Athanasius and Nestorius's arrival as exiles, it is known that many people visited here from the outer world. A. Fakhry noted "Since they (the routes of the desert) were first used in ancient times, millions of men and animals have trodden there, and so in the course of time they were marked on the face of the desert." In the Kharga Oasis, Amen or Amen-Re enjoyed great popularity among people living in the Nile Valley and was worshipped by the people making a living by agriculture and cattle breeding and by the soldiers and merchants who were constantly in transit. Transportation was radically transformed in the second half of the 9th Century BC by the introduction of the dromedary camel. It made much larger and faster caravans possible. Then how did the Kharga Oasis
connect with the Nile Valley and other outer places, and what were the goods transported between them? 6

The Kharga Oasis is located topographically parallel to Naqada, Edfu, Hierakonpolis and Abydos on the bank of the Nile (Fig. 2). These were powerful cities around 3000 BC, the first glorious period of the Egyptian Civilization. Harkhuf, a governor of Elephantine and an expedition leader in the reign of Pepy II, took the oasis route from Abydos to Yam, a foreign land to the south of Egypt, via the Kharga Oasis during his third expedition. Sesostris I consolidated his hold over the oases in the Libyan Desert, and particularly maintained the links between Abydos and the Kharga Oasis. 7 Kharga was also considered important because of a route from Asyut (called Lykopolis “wolf city” in Greek) as G. Wagner has noted when examining the network of oases. 8 Wepwawet with a Jackal head was the protectorate god of Lykopolis and he was often represented on the relief of the Hibis Temple. 9 His cult was particularly connected with Asyut in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods. It was believed that Wepwapet, an opener of the ways, was the navigator when Egyptian kings led their armies to conquer foreign countries. He also led the deceased kings to the next world because he performed the “Opening of the Mouth” Ceremony in the Pyramid Texts. If ancient Egyptians regarded Asyut as the entrance to another world, it is possibly that the Kharga Oasis represented a foreign country or even another world itself. To connect with Asyut and the Kharga Oasis meant to connect with this world, the Nile Valley and the next world, the Western Oases.

It is also an important consideration that the Kharga Oasis was close to Thebes, the religious centre of Egypt. According to the accounts given by Herodotus and Plutarch, Cambyses II’s expedition arrived at the Kharga Oasis from Thebes in seven days, and from there the expedition moved to the Siwa Oasis. 10 However, it was completely destroyed by a great and violent wind. If this account is even partially credible, it is possible that a route from Thebes to the Kharga Oasis was also one of the main routes – equal to the Abydos and Lykopolis routes. The close relationship between the Kharga Oasis and Thebes is also pointed out by R. S. Bagnall. 11 Moreover, Thebes connects to the Red Sea via Coptos. It makes us suppose that the route to the Kharga Oasis in the Western Desert via Coptos and Naqada possibly developed as the terminal of the Wadi Hammamat connecting to the Red Sea in the east. Darius I actually reopened the great quarries of the Wadi Hammamat. 12 It is known that Naqada was a huge city since the Predynastic Period. So the Kharga Oasis was certainly the closest to the Nile among the Western Oases and the temples of this Oasis obviously played an important role as a supply centre of the water and foods that
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the caravans, from Abydos, Asyut or Thebes along the Nile to the Western Desert, needed.

At the same time, the Kharga Oasis became a window to the Nile world and was situated in the centre of the large trade network for the caravans connecting other oases to the west and Nubia to the south. It was especially important that the Kharga Oasis controlled the desert road connecting Egypt with Nubia called later the Darb el-Arba'in, the Forty Days Road. On an inscription in Karnak which describes the great victory over the Libyans and the Sea Peoples by Merenptah, the importance of the route to Nubia was mentioned. In this inscription, it is indicated that the Libyans and the Sea Peoples invaded Egypt from the Western Delta in the battle of Perire, then they charged forward to the south and arrived at the Farafra Oasis via the Siwa Oasis. This means that the route from the Mediterranean coast usually headed south via the Western Oases in those days, and it also means that the Kharga Oasis linked routes from four directions. Although the Kharga Oasis is topographically distant from the Nile Valley and located on the frontier, this doesn’t necessarily mean that it was far from mainstream ancient Egyptian culture. In fact the Kharga Oasis played an important role in connecting the Nile, the Mediterranean, African and the Sahara. For example, Darb el-Arba’in connected Asyut in the Nile Valley with Darfur in western Sudan. Moreover, Darfur led to the Niger. Many caravans crossed over borders in this network.

The Romans also expanded their military garrisons in the Western Desert as they needed armies to protect caravans and valuable goods. Some temples were rebuilt, extended, reformed and converted to fortresses in the Kharga Oasis as Roman outposts. Buhen or Semna in the Middle Kingdom, near the Second Cataract, were made of mud-bricks and intended as huge Egyptian fortresses. However, fortresses in the Kharga Oasis were much smaller than these. The difference was their geographical conditions. Buhen and Semna were located on the bank of the Nile, whilst Nadura and El-Ghueita were located on a hill-top along Darb el-Arba’in as overland route. These differences resulted from the builders being Roman rather than Egyptian. It is known that Romans often constructed the Hill-top defenses on the frontiers of the Roman Empire such as Belgica in Gallia.

Although some hill-top fortresses in the Kharga Oasis functioned purely to monitor intruders such as Nadura, there were also evacuation shelters against attacks by intruders similar to the Roman fortresses in Europe and the Mediterranean World or Medinet Habu on the west bank of the Nile. Briefly these aeries were located in militarily defendable places. So it is generally
believed that the temples of the Kharga Oasis were later reused as military garrisons or fortresses in the Roman Period. However, it is obvious that these places were used as temples before the Roman fortifications. With a broader perspective, temples are traditionally sacred places in every part of the world. It was thought necessary to maintain these sites because of their importance to the people who lived there. So it is necessary for us to think not only of military reasons but also of "the original meaning of the place = the space" (why did only remains exist on the hill-top?).

Thus, temples of the Kharga Oasis were used as both military posts or as sacred places. These might even be a part of a city as well. Then what were the goods transported between these fortresses and caravans and routes under the protection of the Kharga Oasis, and the Nile World to the east? Natron and salt, alum and wine are highly possible as specialty products in the Western Desert. A certain amount was obtained from salt pans oases in the Western Desert. Salt was mainly used for dried foods such as fish and meat, or making bread. However, salt was also used for making faience and glass. Moreover, natron, a major element of salt, was absolutely imperative for the mummification process. Salt and natron were also standard requirements with bread, beer, oxen, geese and cloth on traditional offering lists in the Old Kingdom. The Kharga Oasis was widely known for providing alum in the Mediterranean World. It was probably used as a mordant or fixing agent in dyeing, and it could be used to curdle milk.

Many people such as craftsmen or peasants and also merchants and soldiers were living in the Kharga Oasis because it was a rich, cultural a cross road. Agricultural crops were harvested with rich soil and a good supply of water in this region. The Kharga oasis was especially famous for grapes, the main material for making wine. Although vineyards existed throughout Egypt, one of the best grapes came from the Oases of the Western Desert. For example, it is known that one wine jar from the tomb of Tutankhamen came from the Kharga Oasis. This signifies that grapes or wine from the Kharga Oasis were used for funeral and ritual ceremonies. El-Ghueita (called "Perwesekh" by the ancient Egyptians) was particularly famous as a source of fine wines on inscriptions in Theban tombs.

There are some reliefs showing either Darius I or Nectanebo II dedicating wine to Amen in the Hibis Temple. There are also many reliefs in which Darius I dedicates wine to gods such as Onuris. As we know that large quantities of the wine used for the jubilee festival of Amenophis III came from El-Ghueita in the Kharga Oasis, temples and fortresses there were specifically
constructed to protect famous vineyards from enemies such as Nomad Bedouins (Blemmyes).26 These nomads are known to have attacked the caravans travelling between Coptos and the ports along the Red Sea, and to have delivered a damaging blow to the trade relationship between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.27 They also eventually invaded the Kharga Oasis and exercised an overwhelming influence there. After that the Roman troops and fortresses scattered throughout Egypt gradually changed their role from defense against foreign invasion to internal control of the native Egyptians.28

As mentioned above, the Nile Valley and the Kharga Oasis always maintained strong links with each other and had a steady stream of travelers between the two. Although it is supposed that the main routes to the Kharga Oasis were from Asyut, Abydos and Thebes, Thebes was definitely the most frequently used. There was not only economical interaction but also religious interaction between the Kharga Oasis and Thebes. It is obvious that the Theban Triad, Amen, Mut and Khons were adored in most temples throughout the Kharga Oasis. This proves that these two kinds of interaction greatly contributed to the large influx of settlers and travelers in the Western Desert. From the 27th Dynasty, adoration of Amen in Thebes was more discernibly brought to the Kharga Oasis as is shown by the evidence of the reliefs at the Hibis Temple.

III. Did the Kharga Oasis take over the religious importance of Thebes in the 27th Dynasty?

As mentioned in the first chapter, it is obvious that the adoration of Amen, came from the Nile Valley to the Kharga Oasis from the 27th Dynasty onward, and quickly became established there. Then, in the second chapter, it was shown that the route of Amen adoration reached the Kharga Oasis via at least three routes of which Thebes was the most used. Finally, the third chapter will attempt to show why the Kharga Oasis was selected as the main area of religious activity and why any temples based upon Amen adoration (such as the Hibis Temple) began to be constructed from the 27th Dynasty onward by the Persian kings, such as Darius I. When analyzing these points, I will continue to focus on the Kharga Oasis and it’s relationship with Thebes.29

Egypt was put under control of a Satrap in 525 BC following its conquest by the Persian king Cambyses. According to G. Hölbl, Cambyses did not have a good relationship with the Egyptian priesthood, but his successor, Darius I, acquired a more peaceful reputation because he sought reconciliation with priests and constructed a huge temple to Amen of Hibis in the Kharga Oasis.30 N. Grimal and A. B. Lloyd also think that Darius I re-established the traditional
prerogative of the temple estates and ordered the construction of the Hibis Temple. However, they don’t explain why Darius I selected the Kharga Oasis as the location for the Hibis Temple, a huge structure for the veneration of Amen. I thought that it was not a plausible enough reason that the Kharga was chosen purely as a strategic point and a supply centre.

Although it is perhaps unnecessary to mention Athanasius and Nestorius, the Kharga Oasis was regarded as both a place of asylum and exile since ancient times. Amenemnisu, a king of the 21th Dynasty, exiled his political opponents to the oases of the Western Desert, as did Horemheb in the 18th Dynasty. By the Third Intermediate Period at least, Kharga Oasis had become a place of exile for people who were judged to be undesirable in the Nile Valley. It is obvious that the Kharga Oasis was regarded as a place of banishment because we can find many reliefs of Seth who was expelled by Horus to the West in the myth of Osiris. So why were temples built in the Kharga Oasis which had such a negative image? I will now discuss the reasons for my focusing upon both Amen, who was the master of these temples, and Darius I, who left such a great mark on the Kharga Oasis (Fig.3).

Amen maintained his power for a long time because of his religious and political influence as he slowly syncretized with the Sun God Re in the Nile Valley. However, the Greek historian Plutarch (1st to 2nd century BC) described the Theban people as worshipping not Amen-Re but Amen Kematef (Kneph) in those days. Amen was combined with other powerful gods, such as Re and had many flattering adjectives added to his name (such as “strong” and “mighty”). The same phenomenon occurred in the Western Desert. Although the most important god, and the chief god of Thebes, Amen was syncretized with many native local gods in the Western Desert (for example, Amen was worshipped as Amen-nakht in Ein Birbiyeh of the Dakhla Oasis). Properly speaking, the Hibis and El-Zayyan Temples were dedicated to “Amen of Hibis”, “Amen-Re, Lord of Hibis” or “Amen -Re of Karnak who dwells in Hibis.” Although there is no sharp distinction between Amen and Amen-Re in these temples, all known examples laid emphasis on Hibis rather than Thebes. It is possible to explain these phenomena simply by the regular syncretism of Amen with local gods over a long period of time. However, are there possibly any other reasons for this?

Fakhry, who worked in the Kharga Oasis, the Bahariya Oasis and the Siwa Oasis etc, suggested that the Kharga Oasis had its own seat of government on this site. It was no doubt under the control and cultural influence of the Nile Valley since the Old Kingdom and probably became the seat of government during the 26th Dynasty. However, his opinion is difficult to justify because it
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lacks substantial reasons.\textsuperscript{38} We know the kings of the 26\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty such as Psamtek I, Apries and Amasis had architectural activity in the Bahariya Oasis, but it seems that Fakhry thought there was simultaneously the same activity in Kharga. As he mentioned himself that "The foundations were laid in the 26\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty, but the walls were inscribed during the time of Darius I in the Persian Period",\textsuperscript{39} the period when the Hibis Temple was constructed should be taken as in the 27\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty because of such obvious evidence as Darius I's name on the wall of the temple.

It is obvious that Darius I preferred Egyptian architecture and design because there were many Egyptian decorations such as reliefs of Amen, Egyptianized capitals and foundation blocks similar to the one in Hibis.\textsuperscript{40} The close relationship between Egypt and Persia under the reign of Darius I is also demonstrated by the Persian nobles who actually attended Egyptian schools,\textsuperscript{41} and the Egyptian architects, artisans and scientists who were imported to Susa and Persepolis with Egyptian ideas and customs.\textsuperscript{42} A statue that Darius I ordered from Egyptian sculptors has been found at Susa.\textsuperscript{43} It is obvious that Egyptian bronze statuettes, amulets and steles have been found at Susa and Persepolis.\textsuperscript{44} According to Herodotus, it was known that Darius I respected Egyptian technology and scholarly activities. It was also obvious from Diodorus Siculus (I-95.5) and The Demotic Magical Papyrus of London and Leiden (COL.XII-26) that he was also interested in Egyptian religion.\textsuperscript{45} Darius I also reconstructed the important religious cities of Busiris in the Nile Delta and Elkab in the Nile Valley.\textsuperscript{46}

Darius I, devoted himself to re-establishing the temples, reopening the Suez Canal (the construction of which was begun by Necho II in the 26\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty) to connect the Persian Empire with Egypt and reopened the quarries at Wadi Hammamat which directly linked the Nile Valley to the Red Sea. The main artery connecting Eurasia and Africa was created under his patronage. In spite of focusing on Egyptian culture and economy, Darius I didn't leave a mark on Thebes. Moreover, Darius I ordered the construction of the Hibis Temple in the Kharga Oasis\textsuperscript{47} rather than Thebes, the traditional religious centre in the Nile Valley. After the sacking of Thebes, known in the Old Testament, by the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, Theban confidence in its leadership was undermined, but she was still the main temple and had great influence in the Nile Valley. However, D. Klotz, the author of "Adoration of the Ram: Five Hymns to Amen -Re from Hibis Temple", points out that there are no records of the Persians in Thebes.\textsuperscript{48} Although the only material possibly dated to the reign of Darius I is a bronze plaque with a fragment of a cartouche (JE38050) from
"Karnak Cachette" at this time, it is even dismissed by Klotz and G. Vittmann.

In terms of its historical background from the final phase of the 20th Dynasty onward, Thebes was always at risk from rebellion by the native Egyptians. However, as it is known that Upper Egypt during the 26th Dynasty was controlled by the God's Wife of Amen Nitocris, a daughter of Psamtek I, it can hardly be said that the status of Thebes was diminished in the Nile Valley. In fact, there are records that the Beautiful Valley Festival and the Decade Festival were both held in Thebes from the 20th Dynasty to the Roman Period. However, there are no records of these festivals in the 27th Dynasty. Hitherto, it was thought that the choice of location for such major activities as the construction of important temples was strongly influenced by the current capital or seat of the reigning dynasty. So it is very important to confirm the activities in Thebes by the kings of the 27th Dynasty.

I was during this period that Darius I didn't play an active role in Thebes, although he behaved in a dynamic way in the Kharga Oasis of the Western Desert where he ordered the construction of the Hibis and Gueita Temples. Klotz suggests that this radical change in status between Thebes and Kharga resulted in the international displacement of priests and workers from Thebes to Kharga for political, religious, or economic reasons. I also suggest that Theban women priests moved to the Kharga Oasis because of the disappearance of the God's Wife of Amen in Thebes from the 27th Dynasty onward. It is assumed that the religious centre of Egypt shifted from Thebes to Kharga at this time. Although it is a bold assumption, it is certainly an idea worth considering because of the absence of records of the king's activity in Thebes in the 27th Dynasty. Even now, the main route connecting the Nile Valley and the Kharga Oasis is from Asyut, but the influence of Amen in Thebes remains stronger than that of Wepwawet in Asyut to the temples in Kharga. This phenomenon also reinforced Klotz's theory.

Therefore, if this suggestion rings true, are there any other reasons except political, religious and economical? So, I will now focus on customs and culture of the Achaemenid Empire of Persian. Although Darius I brought Egypt under the control of his empire from 522 BC to 486 BC, he didn't stay there through out his entire reign. Kings of the Achaemenid Empire had multiple capitals (such as Susa, Babylon, Ecbatana, Pasargadai, and Persepolis), and so the kings went on a nationwide tour with their inner circles, armies and servants etc. So, in reality, the various capitals for these kings were mainly symbolic and a device for propaganda - reinforcing his kingship of the people with his empire. It is
thought that Persian capitals functioned with only a single huge structure such as a temple in the centre of the city. For example, it seems that there was nothing at all without the palace of Darius I in Susa. This characteristic and situation are echoed by the Kharga Oasis which had the Hibis Temple at its centre. The artistic skill and quality of the reliefs in the Hibis Temple go way beyond the level of a local city. This also strongly suggests a possibility that artisans and craftsmen came from Thebes at that time.

Darius I transferred his capital from Pasargadae to Persepolis after his accession and he constructed his palace in Susa as a winter capital in 521 BC. Although Susa, the capital of Elam since ancient time, had been destroyed by the Assyrians in 647 BC, she recovered as a starting point for “the Persian Royal Road” due to Darius’s building activity. He established the road-relay system using horses (it takes 100 days or more on foot) which connected Susa with Sardis within one week’s journey so that he could succeed in speeding up overall communication. Incase of Egypt Darius I (who attached great weight to the influx of people, goods and information) also selected the Kharga Oasis as the trade centre which linked routes from all four directions. Although Darius I controlled Egypt but he was not an Egyptian and so he didn’t regard the Nile Valley as the centre of his large empire. He focused on the western and southern territories beyond the Nile and there is possibly one more reason he chose the Kharga Oasis. It was the latest example in a typical pattern of domination by different ethnic groups who occupied Egypt throughout its history. They always constructed a new capital city which both respected and accepted Egyptian culture and tradition. For example, the Hyksos built their capital at Tell el-Dab’a, the Macedonian built it at Alexandria and, finally the Persian chose Kharga.

At this point in history, most sources rely heavily upon Herodotus’s description, but we can’t accept it at face value. We should also look at M. Ayad’s hypothesis which focuses on the “God’s Wife of Amen”. As already mentioned, it is known that this special title was given to a woman that had power in Thebes almost equal to a Pharaoh and that it disappeared from the 27th dynasty onward. Ayad explained that the Persian attitude towards women caused this phenomenon because women did not play a major part in Persian politics and religion and were not widely depicted on Persian iconography, even a king’s mother or wife. He thought that the “God’s Wife of Amen” title did not continue in Thebes because there was no tradition of women holding high office in Persia. However, if so, why didn’t this traditional position revive at the end of the 27th Dynasty? Ayad also suggests that the abandonment of the “God’s Wife
of Amen” by the Persians may had led to Thebes eventual loss of religious authority which ultimately resulted in the dramatic decrease of it’s tax collections and a subsequent decline in political strength. However, it is known that Thebes still conducted traditional festivals and underwent extensive remodeling and expansion by the kings after the 27th Dynasty. If Thebes received such a loss of power by the disappearance of the “God’s Wife of Amen” as Ayad suggests, why is there no evidence of this title being reinstated by post-Persian kings. I suggest that the Theban people (including the “God’s Wife of Amen”) who played a key role in the administration in the temples in Thebes actually left this city during this period and relocated to the Kharga Oasis.

I also believe that there may have been an environmental reason why the Persian king chose the Kharga Oasis. Kharga, which is situated in a huge basin, is topographically very different from the Nile Valley. This landscape feature is similar to Pasargad and Persepolis. On the other hand, the winter palace of Darius I was built in Susa, a traditional religious centre and administrative capital in the Persian Empire. It was possibly thought to arrange important palaces in such a way that they faced the East and had an acropolis to the south. For example, the Hibis Temple faces east and Nadura, an adjacent acropolis, is situated on the south hillside. Kharga is topographically similar to Merv (Margiana in Achaemenid Persia) in Central Asia where a fortification was built on a hill-top. At that time, the Kharga Oasis was obviously rich and wealthy as the Greeks called it “the Island of the Blessed”, but, in earlier times, the oasis was only comparable with the inferior Dakhla Oasis. It is thought that the adoption of the qanat (Persian water system) and the sakiya (Persian water mill) in Kharga brought its first real prosperity. Although it subsequently adopted the Roman water system (deep well digging), Kharga was considered an excellent water supply from the Persian Period onward. It can be said that the dream of the Persian people, from ancient times until the present day, was to make a lush and green paradise using an abundant and controllable water-source.

Finally, I suggest that the Persian religion and its art were relatively easy to accept in Egypt at that time. Zoroastrian dualism became popular in Achaemenid Persia and was embodied by the deity Ahura Mazda who judged right and wrong, and gave “the Last Judgement”. Zoroastrian dualism had some similarity to the myth of Osiris which describes the conflict between Horus, a benevolent god, and Seth, an evil god. The idea of “the Last Judgement” is also similar to chapter 125 of “the Book of the Dead”. Iconographically, Ahura Mazda who is depicted by a sun with wings and Mithra (who was worshipped before the
beginning of Zoroastrianism) were both symbolized by sun and fire and enabled the Persian’s to easily accept the worship of the Egyptian Sun God, Amen-Re. It is also known that there is an iconographic similarity connecting kingship with a lotus in both Egypt and Persia. Moreover, Darius was familiar with the motif of a large-horned ram (which was a symbol of both the Persian royal family and Persian rhyton) (see fig.4), and Amen of Hibis with a ram’s head. So the people who moved from Thebes always consciously gave a ram’s head to the god Amen of Hibis.

Conclusion

The evidence that the Persian kings in the 27th Dynasty didn’t continue construction activity in Thebes but instead built some huge structures in the Kharga Oasis combined with the fact that the institution of “the God’s Wife of Amen” disappeared from Thebes at the same time possibly indicates a large-scale migration from Thebes to the Kharga Oasis. The migration created a unique Amen adoration in Kharga. Darius I, a Persian king, willingly allowed the worship of Amen because Amen was a sun god with a ram’s head – like the Persian Royal family’s own motif.

The study of the 27th Dynasty is not complete even now. It is the dynasty regarded as “an Egyptian Dark Age” in ancient history. However, if we look from different angles such as the Persian culture and construction activity in the Kharga Oasis, then it is possible to more folly understand the complete history of this period.

I am very grateful to Prof. H. Kamei, General Director of AROD (Association Research for Oases and Deserts), Mr. Bahgat Ahmed Ibrahim, General Director of Antiquities, Mr. Magdy Hussein, Chief Inspector and his colleagues in Kharga. Dr. David. Klotz, lecturer of Yale University and Mr. Simon Rowson. This study was financially supported by the Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research, the Ministry of Education, Science and culture, Japan [No. 19254002: Hiroyuki Kamei (Tokyo Institute of Technology)] and [No. 19401033: Michinori Ohshiro (Komazawa University)]

Notes


10 Hedodotus (3-26); Plutarch, Vitae illustrium virum (9-26).


16 S. Johnson, Late Roman Fortifications (New Jersey, 1983), pp.226-244.

17 H. Wilson, Egyptian Food and Drink (Buckinghamshire, 2001), p.44.


20 Wilson, op.cit., p.47.


27 W. H. Kenneth, Coinage in the Roman Economy, 300 B.C. to 700 A.D. (Baltimore, 1996),
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p.307.
29 Some scholars suggest that the temples were built before the 25th Dynasty. However, there is no physical evidence of such early activity. In Gueita, there is ceramic evidence of daily activity dated to the New Kingdom. D. Darnell, Gravel of the Desert and Broken Pots in the Road: Ceramic Evidence from the Routes between the Nile and Kharga Oasis, in R. Friedman (ed.), Egypt and Nubia: Gifts of the Desert (London, 2002), p.173.
31 Grimal, op.cit., p.370.
38 R. Wilkinson suggests that it may have begun to have been build in the 25th Dynasty. R. H. Wilkinson, The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt (New York, 2000), p.236.
39 Fakhry, Dachla Oase, op.cit., p.909.
42 Klotz, op.cit., p.7.
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44 S. Razmjou, Religion and Burial Customs, in J. E. Curtis and N. Tallis (eds.), Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia (Berkeley, 2005), figs.263 and 265.
45 F. I. Griffith and H. Thompson, The Demotic Magical Papyrus of London and Leiden (Milano, 1904), p.87 (COL.XII-26); Klotz, op.cit., p.7-n.41.
48 Klotz, op.cit., p.8.
51 At that time, there were three rivals who had power in Egypt. The first was Rameses XI, a canonical king who lived in Pirameses in the delta. The second was Smendes, an administrator of Rameses XI and his successor. He was also the first king in the 21st Dynasty, who ruled the northern part of Egypt from Tanis in the delta. The third rival was Herihor who controlled Upper Egypt and Nubia.
52 Klotz, op.cit., p.8.
54 Klotz, op.cit., p.8.


58 Herodotus (3-26); Fakhry, *Siwa Oasis* (Cairo, 1990), p.81.

59 Bagnall and Rathbone (eds.), *op.cit.*, p.251.
Fig. 1: Amun of Hibis in Hibis Temple

Fig. 2: Map
Fig. 3: Cartouche of Darius I in Hibis Temple

Fig. 4: Gold Rhyton in the Shape of a Ram's Head\textsuperscript{59}